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ABSTRACT

As we reach the mid-point of the 1970's, we find women in many different positions: working and non-working, middle-class and working class, urban and rural, black and white. There are women with strong ethnic ties or religious orientations, first generation city dwellers and suburbanites. Three factors -- increased female labor force participation, increased divorce rate, and decreased birth rate -- are all having an impact on womens' situation in the 1970s. It is stressed that working class and black women have found support for their roles in a social network of kin and neighbors and in the institutions of the neighborhood. Upwardly mobile blue collar couples, in contrast, may move to cut their ties with family and relatives. It may be that the increasing isolation of such women may be a difficult adjustment. The isolation of the housewife is also related to problems of adapting family responsibilities to new work roles. Legislative reforms like the Equal Rights Amendment, it is concluded, speak to and benefit women in need of jobs, credit, education, better health care and beenfits, and protection from all forms of discrimination. Understanding and appreciating the cultural diversity of women will perhaps bridge these differences and to communicate the similarities in all womens' situations. (Author/JM)

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THE ROOTS OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY AMONG AMERICAN WOMEN

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Crystal Lee Jordan worked in a textile mill in North Carolina; the wife of a fork-lift driver at a paper mill and the mother of three children, in 1973 she joined in a union drive and lost her job (Leifermann, 1975). Nancy Picard also a Southerner is young, divorced and a successful interior decorator in Montgomery Alabama. She feels she is a "free spirit" and an independent professional, yet she does not belong to any Women's Liberation organizations, says that in a marriage "the first thing should be your husband" and wants a man to "treat her like a woman" (New York Times, March 20, 1975).

Ruth Levine, a mother of five in her mid-forties, joined a consciousness-raising group of working class women in East Flatbush and, desnite some resistance from her taxi-driver husband, took a job as a filing clerk in a large insurance agency. After years of being a wife and mother, she found that her husband's attitudes began to change and that the additional income was a welcome addition to the household budget (Jacoby, 1973). Eleanor Chadwick Graziano another working class woman is a deeply religious wife of a shipping foreman for a Boston newspaper. Her close relationship with her mother, her sense that "you must live with a belief in God" and that "there are some things only God knows what to do with" stand in sharp contrast to her husband's practicality, his desire to provide a house for the family and a college education for his children (Cottle, 1973).

Maggie Holmes, a Black woman from the South has worked as a domestic, hotel chambermaid and as "kitchen help in cafes" to support her four children. She describes the degradation of scrubbing floors on her knees for white suburban Chicago housewives or career women and says, "If you work in one of them houses eight hours, you gotta come home and do the same thing over...tired" (Terkel, 1974:112). Kidada is a 23 year-old Black professional woman who works as a city planner in the Mayor's office of an Eastern city (McCloud, 1975). She makes $16,000 a year, but feels many of her older colleagues (some of them White) resent her position

and influence. Doctor Lydia Black, a radiologist hires a housekeeper to help care of the housework. Her husband is a doctor and their two incomes allow them to have a summer and a winter house and to entertain extensively (Ondis, 1975). She feels her career is top priority, but enjoys her minority status in the medical profession, since it accounts for certain niceties extended to women doctors and gives her a sense of being "special" (Lonate, 1968:81).

These seven women exemplify the cultural diversity among women in America in the 1970's. Their lives illustrate the ways in which women are divided by class, race, ethnicity, religion and region. Each pair shows the kind of differences which provide women with different life experiences. Crystal Lee and Nancy are both Southern women for whom the image of the "Lady" is still important, yet they stand opposed as "millworker" and "professional", as married and divorced; their senses of what will improve their lives (the union vs. professional and social recognition) are very different. Ruth Levine and Eleanor Graziano are both ethnic working class urbanites from the Northeast. Both have husbands who have strong images of themselves as male providers, but the former seeks to change her life through a job and the latter finds comfort in her religion and her role as wife and mother. They all stand in contrast to the Black women who have experienced in their everyday lives the impact of personal and institutional racism which leads them, in turn, to feel little in common with White women and to identify themselves primarily as "Blacks" rather than as "women". Yet surely, the life experiences of the domestic worker and the professional (essentially issues of class) must create a widening gap between these two women. The woman doctor has combined motherhood and a career, but through hiring other women to take over some of her domestic responsibilities, she seems to accept the implicit definition of men's roles and women's roles and is still a long way from the feminist's view of shared housework and equality in careers.

As the Women's Movement has developed during the 1970's there seems to be agreement among women concerning issues relating to women's roles in the work force, but a great deal of tension and disagreement around issues which center on women's role in the family, particularly the Equal Rights Ammendment and abortion legislation. Those who argue against the ERA feel it will "destroy" the fibers of family life in our country." Catholic "Right to Life" groups feel the ERA will help legitimize abortions. Others think the ERA will take women out of the home and will minimize "what God intended a woman to do: raise a family." This "backlash" is clearly related to the cultural diversity in American women's roles. Naively thinking that all women, because they are women, have common attitudes and goals, crucial differences have been ignored for too long. It is important, at this juncture, to carefully examine these differences and to understand their historical, ecominic, and social roots.

In many respects all women are alike. During most of their lives, American women are defined as daughters, wives and mothers. Work roles are seen as secondary and family roles as primary in women's lives. Even single women who are self-supporting are still judged against the standards of marriage and motherhood which view their life-styles as deviant. In other words, most women are defined more in relationship to the family than in relationship to economic, political and religious institutions. But the cultural meaning and economic reality of these family roles are very different for women with varying class, ethnic, regional and religious backgrounds. For example, Crystal Lee Jordan's experiences as wife and mother sharply contrast with those of Lydia Black, the doctor, whose life style in turn resembles that of Maggie Holmes' upper middle class employers, more than the mother role which Maggie herself has experienced. This paper will analyze the economic, social and cultural roots of these diverging experiences, beginning in the colonial period and continuing through the nineteenth and Twentieth

centuries, up until the present. In the major body of the paper, I will argue that these differences among women are substantial and seemingly separate women more than they bring them together. But, in concluding, I will suggest some forces which are bringing women together and which are narrowing the gap between women of differing backgrounds.

For middle class and upper middle class women in the past three decades, their cultural definition of themselves and their economic activities have diverged away from a special emphasis on their roles as wives and mothers. They are doctors, interior decorators, urban planners and other professionals as well as future or actual wives and mothers. Even college graduates who drop out of the labor force in order to bear and raise their children think of themselves of returning to work after children reach school age or as being involved in a wide range of voluntary activities (educational, cultural, and social service oriented) in their neighborhoods and communities.

For working class women(both those from White ethnic and from Black communities) their economic roles within the family have continued to be vital for family survival and this has been supported by a strong cultural value placed on motherhood and domestic activities. Working mothers like Crystal Lee or Maggie Holmes know their paychecks help to feed and clothe their children. Housewives like Eleanor Chadwick Graziano and Ruth Levine know that their work at home helps to stretch their husband's wages by saving on food and clothing, doing their own cleaning and cooking rather than buying those services is important in providing a comfortable life for their families. Religion, Catholicism and Judiasm as well as Protestantism, supports and approves the role of the good wife and mother. In the South, the cultural image of the "lady" which emphasizes politeness, decorum and order also places women on a pedestal and sets standards for ideal treatment which working class women may seldom experience but to which they aspire. In other words, for these women, economic functions and cultural definitions have converged to

stress the importance of being a wife and a mother, giving special emphasis to these roles and their feminine, womanly content.

How did these differences come about? What are the historical roots of these divisions? To answer these questions we have to look at the history of the American economy, the role of slavery and immigration in bringing diverse cultural groups into the same society, the development of class differences and the changing role of the family.

From Rural Farm to Industrial City

During the Colonial Period in America (the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) most families lived on small to medium sized individually-owned farms. The American colonies were characterized by a merchantile economy, based on the production of raw materials and farm products. The biggest contrasts were between the small rural communities and the urban centers. Most of the production of spun wool and cloth, raw and processed food products, and other materials for export took place in the countryside; this was an economic system which produced some variation in wealth and status, but not sharp class differences. In contrast, in the growing eighteenth century cities, class differences between labors, artisans, and wealthy merchants and professionals sharpened. In the South, slavery and the plantation system created differences based on race and wealth. On balance, however, the farm family was the most important unit of production and consumption throughout the colonial period.

During the colonial period, women's work and skills were used in the home to process farm products. Women made soap and candles for home consumption and sale; they put up pickles and baked goods; they milked the cows and made cheese and other dairy products; they cared for the chickens and sold the eggs. They spun wool, wove cloth, and mended clothing. In other words, they produced both

items for family consumption and for the market. For colonial women, it is important to understand, there was no separation between the work place and home life, between paid labor and unpaid housework. Domestic work and production for the market occurred in the same location (the home) and both were vital for family survival. The production of goods was intermixed on a daily basis with caring for children, cooking, cleaning, and other domestic chores.

In the early part of the nineteenth century, first commercialization and later industrialization began to change the character of the family and of women's roles. The growth of a market economy and centralization of production in larger shops and later factories took men out of their homes for work, and separated work and the family.[1]

Class differences--in this instance between paid workers in towns and cities and the owners of factories, merchants, businessmen, and professionals, began to make a real difference both to the cultural definition of womanhood and to the economic function of women within the family. Some of women's work in the home was industrialized. For example, spinning and the weaving of cotton and wool cloth were taken over by the textile industry, and food processing and brewing

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1. This process had several stages which progressed differently depending on the trade or industry. Rather than production being centered in a small shop under the supervision of a journeyman, where workers had control over all phases of production and where individuals were knowledgable about all phases of making a product, work began to be put out in a piece work system, so that each worker did only one step in the production process. At the same time, the ownership of the materials necessary for production began to fall into the hands of merchants, and, later, industrialists. Rather than producing commodities directly for the market, more and more craftsmen and outworkers became wage laborers. The centralization of production in factories and the increase in mechanization form the last step in this process, and although mills were important in textiles early in the century, factory production of other goods came later (Thompson, 1963)

were transferred to industrial contexts and out of the home. Women (especially young unmarried ones) followed their work into the factory, becoming unskilled and semi-skilled workers in textile, clothing, and food processing industries. Wives and mothers remaining at home began to purchase items they and their daughters had previously made, and unpaid labor at home (housework) became devalued as the working class family became more and more dependent on the wages of the husband and unmarried children.

At the same time (the early decades of the nineteenth century) an important set of ideas developed which contrasted "The Lady" and "The Mill Girl" (Lerner, 1969). Often referred to as "The Cult of True Womanhood", this set of ideas idealized the middle class wife and mother who practiced purity, piety, domesticity and submissiveness. These ladies were the women idolized in the pages of Godey's Lady's Book, in sermons, "gift books", cookbooks, and "sentimental" novels. In marriage, women were to cultivate chastity and submission, to make the home a cheerful place, dispense comfort and serve as willing nurses for the ills of men and children. They were to become good cooks, cheerful housekeepers and mistresses of womanly skills like needlework and flower arranging. (Welter, 1966) The home was seen as a refuge and retreat: women were seen as "consolers" and "moral uplifters". Especially for the less affluent segments of the middle class--wives of small businessmen and professionals--"True Womanhood" did not mean a life of the "idle rich". Women's work in the home may have meant supervising a servant or even doing some of the housework and child care, but it's end was "moral" and only indirectly economic to cultivate the proper atmosphere within the confines of the husband's income. (Branca, 1974)

As the century progressed, the middle and upper classes[2] came to believe in

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2. Class structure in the nineteenth century was in the process of significant change and much historical work needs to be done to clarify and describe these

the doctrine of "the two spheres". While men were involved with the worldly and sordid aspects of business, commerce, and politics, women in their proper sphere, the home, could nourish the values of moral purity exposing their children to the civilizing aspects of life: religious belief, proper behavior, and pure attitudes. An important "women's culture" emerged based on women's ties to their mothers, sisters, their formal relatives and friends. These relationships often spanned a lifetime and extended over considerable distance as indicated by women's letters to their mothers and close female friends. In these letters women shared their intimate feelings and emotional reactions, their common experiences with marriage and childbirth, and often their sense of isolation, dependence and estrangement from the men. (Smith-Rosenberg, 1975). Letters and Diaries of middle class farm women moving westward indicate not only the difficulties and physical hardships women faced, but their sense of loss as the traditional spheres of women and men began to be erroded and as women found it difficult to reestablish the cultivated home in new pioneer settlements. (Faragher and Stansell, 1975)

In sharp contrast to the image of the "Lady" and "True Woman" was the "Mill Girl", the image characterizing the growing number of young female workers who first found employment in the next textile mills in Lowell, Waltham, and other mill towns of Massachusetts and New Hampshire. For a short period of time (between 1830 and 1860) and in a few locations, Yankee farm girls spent several years living in

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developments. It is difficult to generalize because of the uneven growth of urban areas and increasing stratification. In New York City, for example, by the 1840's there were wealthy families who could pass on inherited wealth to their children, creating the nucleus of an upper class. At the same time there seems to have been a wide range of farmers, businessmen, and professionals who made up what might be called a middle class, though the composition and extent of this class is different depending on geographical context and decade of the nineteenth century. Certainly by the last decades of the century, there was a solidified and closed upper class, made up of great industrial, banking and business families which had emerged in the large cities (see Baltzell, 1958; and Veblen, 1924).

the mills to earn money for their dowries and eventual marriage to farm boys from the local communities.[3]

Much more typical of factory organization was the employment of mill girls who lived with their families rather than in company boarding houses. Especially, with the coming of Irish immigrant families during the 1850's and 1860's, the mill labor force became segmented, with some single men and women living in boarding houses and other families occupying company owned tenements. In some cases, Irish laborers sent their daughters to work in the mills to help supplement a meager family income. In other instances, several family members worked in the mill either on a periodic or relatively permanent basis. Widows with teenage children migrated to mill towns in order to place their sons and daughters in relatively high paying wage jobs. Thus being a mill girl became associated with being an immigrant, living at home, and helping to support a family headed either by a mother alone or by a father who could get only low paying work, either in the mill or out of it.

In sum, when female occupations such as carding, spinning and weaving were transferred from home to factory, women from farm and immigrant backgrounds became many of the new industrial workers. Women of the new commercial and industrial upper classes gained new leisure time as their husbands acquired new wealth. These women became the "Ladies" not in any "idle" sense; they managed large households and a range of servants, yet also found time to participate in local church activities and to aid in moral and community reform. (Smith-Rosenberg, 1972; Benson, 1975) Even middle class women whose husbands were struggling small businessmen or professionals, and who, as a consequence may have sewed their own clothes,

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3. Much of the female culture of the Lowell mill girls was influenced by the image of the "Lady", an image which was possible for Yankee farm girls to strive for once they left the mills to be married to a respectable rural male.

had little help from servants and been responsible for the care and education of their children, worked to increase the quality of the home as the essence of "women's sphere"; they may have been confined by their husband's respectable but not affluent income, but there was no need for them to add to that income through either their own paid labor or that of their daughters. Throughout the nineteenth century class distinctions deepened and social attitudes toward women became polarized (Lerner, 1969:89-90). The "Lady" became an elevated ideal of femininity toward which all women could strive, while the values and life styles of working women and wives of working class men were ignored or denigrated through implicit contrast.

The image of the "Lady" prevailed even to a greater extent in the South. The southern version of womanhood was epitomized by the "submissive wife whose reason for being was to love, honor, obey, and occasionally amuse her husband and to bring up his children and manage his household." (Scott, 1970:54) Within the context of the patriarchal family, the upper class Southern Lady was supposed to be physically weak, and innocent, and like her children and the plantation slaves, completely dependent on her husband. The reality even for privileged Southern women was, as Ann Firor Scott shows, very different; wives of plantation owners often resented their subordination, the sexual double standard and continued years spent in child bearing. Rather than being "wilting flowers", they were energetic and hardworking household administrators, overseeing numerous chores (including hog slaughtering, canning, gardening, and sausage making), doing their own sewing, weaving or quilting, attending to their children, or supervising the work of household servants or hired men. (Scott, 1970:30-35). Life, of course, was much more difficult for the wives of the average Southern tenant farmer; these women worked in the fields, hired out to do housework or sewing for more prosperous neighbors (Scott, 1970:35) and in the last decade of the nineteenth

century flocked into new jobs in mills, laundries, box and cigarette factories. (Scott, 1970:121)

In the slave community, Black women filled two important roles. Far from being matriarchs, they were field slaves and household slaves and therefore were part of the work force that sustained the plantation system by producing agricultural surpluses and maintaining the daily life of the planter's family. In the slave quarters, the Black woman performed the only work which was not directly and immediately claimed by the slave owner: This domestic work (feeding and caring for men and children) was, on the one hand, outside the slavery system, and, on the other, absolutely essential for the survival of the slave community (Davis, 1971:7). The Southern Lady, the wife of the yeoman farmer, and the Black slave woman were all subordinated, but in different ways by the plantation system. Though Southern plantation mistresses may have been quiet abolitionists (Scott, 1970: 48-52), they were cast in the role of mistresses vis a vis Black women, a relationship of fundamental inequality. And they enjoyed a standard of living and freedom from manual labor unobtainable for the average farm wife. These class and racial differences divided women within the context of a rural plantation system; women's work was in the home, but the supervisory and skilled work (fine sewing and cooking) was done by Southern Ladies while the menial tasks in house and field were performed by Black women. White women who lived on small farms, like their Northern counterparts in the Colonial era, did both kinds of tasks themselves, but they experienced the privilege of membership in the White race, desnite their lack of an affluent life style.

THE IMPACT OF IMMIGRATION AND THE NEW URBAN WORKING CLASS

As the nineteenth century progressed there was a sharpening of class, regional and rural-urban differences which in turn separated the Plantation mistress, the

upper-class Boston matron, and the wife of a small town professional or middle class farmer from the mill girl, the southern tenant farmer's wife and the daughters of former slaves. Industrial growth created expanding cities and the need for a large paid labor force, a situation which shaped the lives of vast numbers of European immigrants who arrived in America between 1840 and 1924. Scholars (e.g. Gordon, 1964:132-136) have distinguished between the "old immigration" (1849-1882) and the "new immigration" (1882-1924). During the old immigration, approximately ten million people of Irish, German and Scandanavian descent migrated to America. Germans, Swedes and Norwegians made their way to the rural areas and growing cities of the midwest, but the Irish, escaping from the potato famine of the late 1840's, had no means of traveling West (Handlin, 1941:37, 52) and crowded into the cities along the Eastern Seaboard (Boston, New York, New Haven).

The new immigration brought peasants, workmen and tradesmen, and refugees from urban ghettos who largely came from Eastern and Southern Europe. They were mainly Slavs, Jews, and Italians, who came to late to find free land on the frontier, and, instead, made their way into the factories and sweatshops of the urban areas of the East and Midwest (Feldstein and Costello, 1974:3).

Information on immigrant women is scattered and incomplete, but we can get some sense of their lives by examining the roles women played in the paid labor force[4] in the first decade of this century. In 1900, only 17.7% of all employees were women over sixteen (Baker, 1964:75), but immigrant women undoubtedly made of a disproportionate number of those who worked outside the home as well as with-

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4. An account of women's paid employment should not ignore the fact that most women worked without pay inside their homes caring for their husbands and children (cooking, cleaning, washing and doing other maintenance work). Even unmarried single women who worked and lived at home probably helped in some household chores. Married women may have combined unpaid housework and child care with paid "homework" for the garment or other industries.

in it. Most women were employed in domestic service (33.24%) and worked as servants, waitresses, housekeepers, and laundresses. Another 18.24% were agricultural laborers and farmers. The third most popular female occupation was dressmaking (13.49%), while another 5.34% worked in textile mills. Other women were clerks (4.62%), saleswomen (2.80%), nurses and midwives (2.04%).[5] (Journal of Political Economy, 1906:14:509)

Native white women (of native born parentage) were over represented in the better jobs (in the professions and public service). Foreign born, first generation immigrant women were more likely to be employed in manufacturing (including dressmaking, artificial flower making, and box making as well as textiles and the metals industries) and in domestic service. Second generation immigrant women seem to have been employed in clerical and sales work along with some domestic and factory employment. Black women were concentrated in agricultural and domestic jobs. More importantly in 1910, when only 20% of white women were in the paid labor force, more than one half of all Black women were working for wages predominantly in these two occupations (Women's Bureau, 1925:12). Work outside the home for others, in addition to work in the home for the care of their parents or their own families, was a necessity for Black women, even more than White immigrant women, and they, therefore were more likely to bear the burden of two jobs.

In 1900, most paid workers were young women, 29% between 14 and 24 years of age, and 19.4% between 25 and 34 years old (Oppenheimer, 1970:8). However, not all women dropped out of the labor force after a few years. The early death of men and the preponderence of single female migrants in some ethnic groups created imbalances in the pool of men who could serve as bread winners. Many working women (31.4%) remained unmarried and self-supporting or became widowed or divorced

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5. The remaining 12.96% may have included teachers, typists, telephone operators, and women engaged in homework, among other female occupations.

and hence returned to the labor force. Servants and saleswomen tended to be in their late teens and early twenties, while nursemaids, laundresses, dressmakers, and teachers were in their early thirties, and housekeepers were usually over forty years of age (The Survey, 1913:324). Most Black women worked throughout their childbearing years; married women in mill towns like Fall River and Lowell, Massachusetts, continued to work, and, in other cities, even married women with working husbands ran boarding houses, took in laundry, or did homework in the garment industry.[6]

Thus many workers--the Swedish servant girl, the German nursemaid, the Polish laundress, the Jewish seamstress, and the Irish or Yankee telephone operator--were daughters from working class homes who supported themselves and contributed to their families before marriage. Others--the Black domestic, the French Canadian weaver--were mothers whose work was crucial to family support; and finally some--particularly the Italina or Irish homemaker--integrated sewing, basting, or finishing work with their household and child care chores.

The literature on women and work in the pre-World War I era provides contrasting images of domestic work, employment in textile and garment industries, and sales and telephone jobs which became part of the expanding clerical and service sectors of the economy as the twentieth century progressed.

A Black domestic worker in 1915 describes her situation as follows:

> 'I frequently work from fourteen to sixteen hours a day. I am compelled...to sleep in the house. I am allowed to go home to my children, the oldest of whom is a girl of 18 years, only once in two weeks... I live a treadmill life and I see my own children only when they happen to see me on the streets...You might as well say that I'm on duty all the time...from sunrise to sunrise, every day in the week. I'm the slave, body and soul of this family.' (Lerner, 1973:227-228)

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6. Women's work in the textile and garment industries (including homework) was often seasonal; thus married women might work only a few weeks a year, yet return to the same kind of job and even the same employer, year after year.

However, relatively few domestic servants were Black outside of the South. In 1900 domestic servants were drawn from a variety of Northern European groups including the Scandanavian countries, Ireland, Switzerland, and Germany.[7] Like Black women, these servants also suffered from the low status of the job, the long hours (from 6 am to 8 pm), the low pay, fatigue from standing on their feet all day, isolation with no chance for a life of their own, and the whims of middle-class mistresses (The Independent, 1902:14)

Washing and ironing were time consuming and arduous tasks at the turn of the century and most middle class women either had a laundress come to their homes one or two days a week (see "A Washerwoman" In: the Independent, 1904, reprinted in Stein and Taft, 1971) or sent their laundry out to large commercial steam laundries. A description of a Pittsburgh laundry in 1908 includes the following portrait of the working women:

> 'As it nears seven in the morning, one may see the girls coming down the street...Several men, high-cheeked Slavs, have just gone in, but close behind them is a group of American girls, collarless and roughjacketed, with shoes much worn and old. There is pride in their look, but none of the almost defiant independence which one instinctively reads into the stubborn pace of the three Polish girls who follow. These come linked together in the spirit of 'we against the world' even if 'we' be only three feeders at a mangle, and the world, that large impersonal thing which is represented by the foreman. (Feldstein and Costello, 1974)

The conditions in these laundries--the heat, the steam, the heavy work, the lack of good drainage or fresh air--made the jobs for women who did hand washing and attended the mangle not only tedious and difficult, but unhealthful as well.

The textile and clothing industries provided much of the factory work available to women, though in conditions not much better than the laundries. Continu-

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7. In 1900, 27% of all domestic servants were Black, while 47% were native-born and 26% were foreign born immigrant women. Over half of the Swedish employed women were servants and nearly the same proportion of employed Norwegian and Danish women were in domestic service. Although only approximately 30% of the employed Irish and German women were domestic servants, this amounted to 195,000 Irish and 160,939 Germans (Journal of Political Economy, 1906:506-508).

ing the family system begun in the early nineteenth century, the New England mill towns thrived on the work of the French Canadian, English and Irish immigrants. Changes in technology had made weaving a woman's job, learned by girls in the mills at an early age, but carried on into their married years. For example, Mary, whose mother had worked in the mills in England before coming to Fall River, Massachusetts to work, at first staved home to take care of the younger children in the family.

> "I got a job 'spooler-tender' when I was twelve--there wasn't the law then. .I must of been about fourteen when I wnet to weavin' and I learnt quick. My but I was proud when I got them first four looms. I liked the mill better than workin' at home. At first the noise is fierce, and you have to breath the cotton all the time, but you get used to it...but when they gave us twelve looms I didn't see that we could make out to live at all...It makes you crazy watchin' 'em. You just try it!" (The Independent, 190, reprinted in Stein and Taft, 1971:29-30).

Work was just as hard in the factories of New York's Lower East Side and Brooklyn in the clothing industries where young women (often Jewish) were shirtmakers, cap makers and undershirt makers. Sadie, a young sixteen year-old Jewish girl from Poland tells of making undershirts in a sweatshop in Brooklyn:

> "The machines go like mad all day, because the faster you work the more money you get...All the time we are working the boss walks about examining the finished garments and making us do them over again if they are not just right...The machines are all run by foot power, and at the end of the day one feels so weak that there is a great temptation to lie right down and sleep." (The Independent, September, 1902, reprinted in Stein and Taft, 1971:117-118).

Daughters of foreign born parents and native young women from more comfortable working and lower-middle class backgrounds were able, in the early decades of the century, to get jobs as sales girls and telephone operators. Though these occupations fit the criterion of respectibility more than domestic or factory work, they too were tiring and low paid jobs. A sales girl at a New York department store described the jobs of cash girls, stock girls, and wrappers as the lowest paid pos-

itions. As a sales girl her pay was higher, but there were problems of placat-int the matronly customers under the watchful eye of the supervisor (The Independent, July, 1902; reprinted in Stein and Taft, 1971:4). In an anonymous account of her training and employment at the Chicago Telephone Company, a young woman describes her first afternoon at the job.

> "Meanwhile the other subscribers in trouble kept on jiggling their receivers up and down. If I could only have screamed at them to wait a minute. But I had to take one at a time. I kept telling myself not to lose my head. But I felt as if I should at any moment. I pictured myself uttering a roar of rage, disconnecting all my cords and hurling my stool at the Chief Operator." (Life and Labor, 1921:51).

These examples from the lives of domestic servants, mill workers, like Mary, and women in the needle trades like a Sadie or Rose, illustrate the ethnic character of the urban working class. Although not all working class women worked for wages, a great many did so during part of their lives; for the most part the jobs were tedious, physically tiring and low paid. Furthermore, paid work was taken on either by daughters or wives in the context of family survival.

Daughters lived at home and contributed to family support or, if they lived away, they sent money home to supplement parental income. A wive's meager pay from homework was even a necessary contribution and income from boarders (made possible partly through a wife's domestic services) was another important supplement. Unable to purchase domestic services and expensive home goods as a middle class lady could, the working class wife performed all the domestic chores (cooking, washing, sewing and child care), with the help of her daughters. Thus women's domestic work was essential in stretching a husband's meager pay check.

The economic realities which the urban immigrant family faced created a different family reality for these women. At various times during the family life cycle, other individuals besides the father, mother and children (the nuclear family) might be living in the same apartment. A recently immigrated relative, a new

son-or daughter-in-law, or an older parent might be part of the family for a time. Thus women's household work often took place in an extended family context. Furthermore, in both native and immigrant working class families, a female kin-based network developed for the exchange of goods and services. This network often centered on the mother-daughter relationship but might include sisters, cousins, and other female relatives as well as neighbors and friends. Young and Willmott (1973) have called this informal set of ties between women, the "female trade union" and have stressed its importance in distributing scarce resources. In many ways this informal "union" was as important for the survival of working class communities as were the "male trade unions" of the work place.

While middle class female networks helped women to bridge the distance from their close relatives and friends and gave them emotional and social support, working class female networks (though also emotionally and socially important) had an economic function as well. Sisters, aunts, and even male relatives were helpful in finding jobs for young women, in providing temporary lodging after the death of a parent, and in caring for a young child in order to release the mother and older children for work. The more people that belonged to the network of kin and neighbors, "the more daughters and daughter substitutes there were, the more effective was the large family as an insurance. If someone was down on his or her luck, someone else might be in the opposite state, and therefore able to contribute, directly or through the intermediary of the grandmothers, to the welfare of the needy...A person in an up phase could help another in a down." (Young and Willmott, 1973:92).

The Continued Importance of the Rural Woman

Not all women, even in the first two decades of the century, were living in cities. The majority of Americans still lived on farms or in small communities in rural areas. Though the hardships of the frontier days were over, the farm

wife still bore heavy responsibilities in maintaining the farm which was often a family venture. In the midwest, "In addition to housekeeping chores, the farm wife cared for the family's vegetable plot and for its supply of livestock for family use. During harvest time, she cooked round the clock for her family and the farm hands." (Banner, 1975:56) Some farm daughters became teachers or domestic servants to supplement family income, while, in the South, wives of tenant farmers (both black and white) helped in the fields.

"Enmeshed in the traditionalist attitudes of rural culture herself the mainstay of a conservative Protestant ministry, and isolated by geography from urban sophistication, her adjustment to her roles seems for-ordained." (Banner, 1975:56) However, white rural women were active in community life (ranging from church activities, to support for the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the suffrage movement, and even the Socialist party (Buhle, ms) and were not always content with their traditional situation, as evidenced by the higher divorce rate in the West, the migration of unattached women to cities, the increasing conflicts of educated daughters with their families.

The Contrasting Images of Women at the Turn of the Century

As I have shown, changes in the American economy and the nature of industrialization which in turn stimulated urban growth and increased migration from Europe, also changed women's economic role and their family life. I have already sketched some of the differences between urban and rural, and between immigrant and non-immigrant women. How do these economic and family differences relate to differing "cultural images" of women? Clearly the simple contrast between the concepts of the "Lady" and the "Mill Girl" created in the early part of the nineteenth century had become altered and diversified by the ethnic heterogeneity within the working class by a new variety in women's as well as men's jobs and by new roles for middle class women in the public sphere.

The upper and middle class "Lady" was still "alive and well" both in Northern cities and in the South. At the end of the Victorian period, the more affluent wife was the mistress of a household enlarged through the employment of servants, mostly women (immigrants in the North and Black women in the South). The literature on domestic servants provides a sense of sharp conflict between the lady employer and the employee. Women here were divided by class as well as ethnicity and race and experienced those differences in their daily lives. On the one hand, the "Lady" or "mistress of the house" was the highest status a woman could attain--affluent and elegant--she stood in contrast to the servant, one of the lowest status jobs a woman could hold (The Independent, 1902:14:36; Journal of Political Economy, 1906:11; The Survey, 1927:47:8:520-522)

Some middle class women, however, were beginning to reject the solely domestic life of the "Lady" and to seek an active role outside the home. More and more women attended college and toward the end of the 19th century began to make inroads into the professions.[8] Other women were active in social reform ranging from the Suffrage movement, to work in the settlement houses of large cities and participation in the growing number of women's organizations like the General Federation of Womne's Clubs, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, and the National Council of women. Many of these organizations accepted some of the values of True Womanhood, for example that women's moral purity and superiority were essen-

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8. Actually women's entry into higher education and the professions started fairly early in the 19th century. Oberlin and Antioch opened their doors to women in 1937 and 1853, and several women's colleges were founded in the 1860's through 1880's. Women fared differently in the professions of law and medicine. Although the first woman lawyer was admitted to the bar in 1869, long and expensive legal contests with bar associations in some states made it difficult for many women to become lawyers. By 1910 there were only about 558 women lawyers in the U.S. (1% of the total number). In medicine, women had somewhat more, though short-lived success. Harriet Hunt, a self-trained woman doctor began practicing in the 1830's and by 1910 there were 9,015 female doctors, or 6% of the profession. During this period, in cities like Boston, women were almost 20% of the practicing physicians of the city, a foothold in the profession that they lost shortly afterwords. (Walsh, 1975)

tial attributes of progress and civilization. They used this rationale however, to expand women's activities (and woman's proper sphere) into the public domain and to argue and actively work for political and social reform. Female reform can be viewed as partly a rejection of male defined aspects of the public sphere which were deemed corrupt (the double standard in sex which created prostitution, the overuse of alcohol and political doubledealing) (Smith-Rosenberg, 1972) and partly as an assertion of female qualities in a new (public) arena, while simultaneously accepting the notion that men and women are inherently different.

At the same time, the image of the "Lady" though far from the reality of most working girls' lives, became an important idea for those women moving out of the working class, framing the standards of respectibility to which they aspiried. Sales girls took pride in their "proper" work in large fashionable department stores, but at the same time, they had to deal with the whims of wealthy matrons whose lives of affluence outstripped their own possibilities for a well-off life style. The telephone company scrutinized their future female employees carefully, provided free lunches in the company cafeteria and a parlor for rest periods. They schooled their operators in the proper tone of voice to use with customers, on the one hand, fitting their female employees into a lady-like image and, on the other, attempting to add an aura of glamour and propriety to an otherwise low paying and nerve-wracking job.

The mills and factories in which women worked were more removed from the world and the values of the wealthy and, in these work places and in the urban neighborhoods which surrounded them, ethnic life and women's roles within it flourished. However, middle class women did attempt organizational alliances with their working class sisters. "Employment societies" and seamstress unions were set up by middle-class matrons to employ working class seamstresses at higher-than-usual wages as early as the mid-nineteenth century (Benson, 1975a). The most

famous of these cross-class alliances was the Women's Trade Union League, active both on a national level in the trade union movement and in New York particularly in the garment industry. However, this coalition of middle-class "ladies" and working class women was not without its tensions and difficulties. Some working class women felt "put down" by the gentility and aristocratic background of league "allies" (or middle class members). "Contact with a Lady," said one working class woman, "Does harm in the long run. It gives the wrong standard." (Dye, 1975:28). However, both middle class and working class members felt the tensions of combining a commitment to women as women and to women as workers; positions on League policies and activities did not simply correlate with class background, but reflected the difficulties of formulating a coherent strategy which included both feminism and trade unionism, as well as the problems of building cross-class alliances (Dye, 1975).

Most working class women saw themselves primarily as future or as actual wives or mothers and felt these familial roles were as important as those held by men. These roles were in turn strengthened and buttressed by cultural ideologies very different from that of the Victorian Lady. Many new immigrants came from Eastern and Southern European peasant communities where the ideals of a "man's honor" and a "woman's shame" were important. According to these values (which were part of, but not restricted to a Catholic heritage), reputation and virtue were embodied in the family, both in the natural qualities of its members and in their proper behavior. Much of this proper behavior centered around the sexual and moral purity of its female members--the daughters and wives. Discretion, shyness, and restraint were thought thought to be natural qualities of women, while manliness, a willingness to defend reputation and a refusal to submit to humiliation were natural qualities of men. A woman who did not live up to the code of virtuous behavior was "shameless" or "beyond the pale"; a man who did not defend the virtue of his sisters or daughters was unmanly, lacked honor, and brought

shame to the family as a whole (Pitt-Rivers, 1966:passim).

This set of ideals was, and still is, widespread in the Mediterranean and Balkan areas of Europe and has been transported to the new world both through Spanish speaking populations (where "machismo" is a common label for the manly side of these virtues) and to North America. In American cities, especially among first generation Italian, Greek and Portuguese immigrants, women were to be protected, marriages were to be arranged and men were to be family providers. Despite the emphasis on male perogatives, this ideology had its supportive side for women as well, and helped them to cope with their struggles with the harsh realities of urban working class life. As Richard Gambino's portrayal of Southern Italian values shows, La Serieta (the serious woman) was a competant and "fine" woman, schooled from early childhood to become a "settled and competant wife," a sharp, practical female who could drive a hard bargain with the local shop keeper and who worked ceaselessly for the welfare of "la famiqlia" (Gambino, 1974:182-191). Gambino's portrait discusses the ambivalences of sexuality for Italians, who saw sex as natural, but who worked to protect their women, contrastint the disgraced or unfortunate woman with the "serious" ideal. He also stresses the appeal of female religious figures like the Virgin and Santa Lucia (who symbolized feminine fearlessness, a clear vision, and a willingness to sacrifice "blood for the blood of the family."). In this set of values, women were the preservers of the home which becomes a "woman's world" (Suttles, 1968:7) and also the conservers of ethnic life and customs. The Catholic Church provided a religious ideology and symbolism which supported these family centered feminine ideals and also gave women a set of institutions (voluntary associations, ethnic festivals, etc.) from which the support work for conserving an ethnic heritage came.

The letters of Polish immigrants give a sense of women's importance to the family in the context of a slightly different Catholic heritage. In the rural

Polish peasant village, the father was the titular head of the family and men controlled the public life of "making business" with other men (discussing politics, business ventures and land purchases while drinking vodka together). However, the rural Polish woman not only was in charge of the children, the kitchen, and the house but also participated in field labor as well. Through her dowry (which included land, house, barn, and/or money) she had considerable say in family decisions. She was the center of family integration and for that reason men often immigrated first, sending money to hire someone to do the heavy farm work. (Block, 1974). Letters collected by Thomas and Znaniecki between these early male immigrants and their Polish families, indicate that behind the deference to husband's wishes the lipservice paid to feminine dependence, Polish peasant women exhibited extraordinary abilities to cope with poverty, sickness and difficulty (Thomas and Znaniecki, 1918:Vol.2). In the American urban setting, this image of the resourceful peasant wife became transformed into the hardworking immigrant woman who both worked the home when necessary and held the family together during periods of her husband's unemployment.

Immigrants from Eastern European "Stetls" brought with them a different set of religious traditions and cultural ideas but ones that nevertheless supported women's domestic roles. Formal religion was the province of men in communities which venerated the role of the male scholar. Restricted in her ability to take part in the study of Hebrew and the scriptures and Jewish ritual bath in the temple and in the home, the Jewish woman was however, crucial in helping her husband to fill his religious role. An ideal woman was a good wife and mother whose ritual obligations included blessing the sabbath bread (taking challah), lighting the Sabbath candles and purifying herself in the ritual bath after menstruation. Her shopping, cleaning, cooking and other domestic "support work" are vital to keeping the Sabbath and in carrying out major holiday rituals. Thus her in-

formal status not only made her the center of the home, but brought her out into the practical world of the market and shop. "She is the wife, who orders the functioning of the household and provides the setting in which each member performs his part. She is the mother, key figure in the family constellation. Moreover, the more completely her husband fulfills the ideal picture of the man as scholar, the more essential is the wife as realist and mediator between his ivory tower and the hurly-burly of everyday life." (Zborowski and Herzog, 1952:131)

In the context of urban poverty that many Jewish immigrants faced, this image of the supportive and yet practical woman buttressed the lives of women who struggled to pay the rent through street vending and shop keeping or who as young daughters worked in sweatshops. The transformation of the shy, deferent immigrant wife is portrayed in a particularly poignant set of images in Joan Micklin Silver's recent film, Hester Street, based on the novella Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto by Abraham Cahan. The main character, Gitl, arrives in New York with her son, to find herself unwanted by her husband who has become Americanized. During the film, with quiet determination, she begins to discard the submissiveness of her old role (symbolized by the married woman's wig which she wears), drive a hard bargain with her husband over the divorce settlement, and finally to let the quiet scholarly boarder know that she is willing to marry him. Gitl is contrasted through the film with Mamie, the more worldly "modern" Jewish woman who works in a sweat shop, attends dancing classes, and with her substantial savings, has attracted Gitl's husband. However, both women, in their different ways, affirm their roles as wives and mold rather than reject their ethnic and religious heritage.

Working class women of Italian, Polish and Jewish background may have viewed themselves in terms of different cultural ideals, but for these and other immigrant

groups, religion, values concerning the nature of sex roles, and ideas about the importance of the family all combined to define women as primarily wives and mothers and to stress the positive aspects of these roles, giving women themselves a sense of their own value and worth.

This overview of women at the turn of the century shows the contrast in women's work, their family situations, and the cultural ideals which define their senses of being women. We can see that the class, ethnic, racial, and religious differences which divided contemporary women (women like Crystal Lee Jordan, Ruth Levine, Maggie Holmes and Dr. Lydia Black) had already taken root and become well developed in the period 1900-1920. Some of these differences between rural and urban women, between middle-class and working class women and between Black and White women, extend further back into our history. However, the emancipation of the slaves, increasing urbanization, the vast immigration of Europeans, and the growth of a leisure class sharpened and diversified these differences, bringing in the important factors of religion and ethnicity as well as changing the nature of rural/urban, racial and class divisions.

THE MODERNIZATION OF WOMEN'S ROLES: CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

In the decades since World War I, there have been substantial changes in women's roles in the work place and the home, in addition to important alterations in the cultural ideas surrounding these roles. In the 1920's there were important "modernizing" changes in the definition of womanhood, though in many ways women's economic and political position did not advance. After receiving the vote, the suffrage movement broke into factions and political activism on the part of women began to wane. The proportion of women in the paid labor force remained about the same during the decade, though it became more respectable for married women to work. Most working class women engaged in paid work,

were employed in mills, factories and sweatshops or still continued to participate in "home work" for low wages. Although there were several significant textile strikes in the early 1920's, union organizing suffered as the decade progressed, so that there were few advances in improving women's wages and working conditions.

One significant change was the increase in secretarial, typing and receptionist jobs; these had been designated as "women's work" early in the century (Davies, 1974:10). But, in the 1920's, these positions became "feminized" associated with the up-to-date fashionable appearance, the aura of glamour, and the pleasing personalities of the "girls" holding them (Smith, 1974:passim). Since these jobs required a high school education (including typing and other office related skills) and fluency in unaccented middle-class English, they were not usually open to first generation immigrant women. It seems more likely that many of these working girls were American born (perhaps from second and third generation immigrant origins), some from working class background, others from rural farm families and still others from the lower-middle class.

Middle class women were finishing high school and going on to college, (as indicated by the decreased labor force participation of teenage girls). With their new education, they entered teaching and nursing, but made no further inroads into the male dominated professions. Most educated middle class women found it difficult to combine family and careers and so gave up their jobs, perhaps not at marriage, but with the birth of their first child. Letters, diaries, and magazine articles of the period indicate that many middle class women struggled with the problems of trying to combine home and job, feeling stiffled with a wifely role; yet without a change in their husband's attitudes or support from the external world, they often retired to their homes to raise their children in resignation (Filene, 1975:141-74).

Women from immigrant backgrounds were experiencing tremendous pressures to

assimilate to the American way of life. Anti-immigrant feelings continued to increase until immigration quotas were imposed in 1924. The public school system had a deep effect on second generation children of Italian, Polish, Jewish, and other ethnic backgrounds, in this mileu, they learned not only English, but new attitudes and behavior patterns. Italian school girls began to reject the "protective" ethic of their parents and insist on dating boys on their own (Gambino, 1973:173-75); Jesish girls like the heroine in Anzia Yezierska's novel, The Bread Givers, (1975 ed.) rejected their father's authority and chose to leave home rather than submit to a husband chosen through the matchmaker. Some worked hard to educate themselves to become teachers; others chose a life of organizing and political activism. However, as immigrant neighborhoods began to evolve into solid working class neighborhoods with an ethnic character, most women married and stayed within these neighborhoods, retaining their important roles within the home and their ties with mothers, sisters, other kin and neighbors.

What changed the most during the 1920's was the ideology which surrounded womanhood; the image of the new woman was the "flapper." Her short skirt, bobbed hair, and worldy manner not only influenced the upper class world depicted in F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel, The Great Gatsby, but also provided an image for the working girl. The popular media--from magazines to movies--sexualized the image of the woman in the world at large and at the same time glamorized the role of women in the home.

The glamorization of the housewife was in part related to the technological revolution in home appliances. With electrification came increasing use of vacuum cleaners, washing machines, and irons. The purchase of household gadgets increased and women began to buy bakery bread and canned foods rather than preparing these at home. However, the total amount of time actually spent on unpaid housework did not decrease. In the 1920's rural housewives only spent 2%

more time on household chores than did their urban sisters (Cowan, 1975:249). Instead, standards of household cleanliness were rising, especially for the middle class; the time saved on activities like cooking and baking was being invested in shopping and child care instead (Cowan, 1975:251). The washing maching and vacuum cleaner were not great liberators of women from household drugery; rather they meant that a woman could easily do the laundry more often and keep her house more spotless than before.

The changing sexual images of the 1920's personified in film personages like Clara Bow or Theda Bara had greater impact on the lives of middle and upper class women than on women in working class and rural situations (Banner, 1975:162-167). The "Lady" did not necessarily become "the vamp", but at least she became more worldly, more sophisticated and more open to the expression of personal and sexual needs, as congruent with the increasing impact of psychoanalysis and Freudian theory on sex-role norms during the 1920's. However, for many American women, those trying to make ends meet on the farm, in the factories, or in the working class home and ethnic neighborhood, the image of the "flapper" and the new sexual mores of the 1920's must have seemed very far away indeed.

While the 1920's did little in reality to change women's home and work roles, the Depression and the 1930's had the impact of drawing women even more tightly into their families. In the paid labor force, women were affected later than men by the economic crisis and then, only as the Depression deepened. Since women's jobs were highly segregated from those of men and concentrated in clerical, service, nursing and teaching jobs, women tended not to be laid off as quickly as men in heavy industry, construction, and manufacturing (Milkman, 1975:12). On the other hand, since women frequently worked in seasonal industries and had irregular employment, and since these conditions were exacerbated during an economic crisis, women were often underemployed during the Depression. The average

wages of women dropped as well, in part because many women were not members of labor unions and in part because larger numbers of housewives began seeking work as their husbands and other family members were laid off. The resulting "overcrowding" of women in the "female" job market resulted in lower pay. Finally, there was widespread downward mobility within the female labor market. Women were displaced from the female professions of nursing and teaching (since the surplus of possible employees meant that standards could be raised and only the most qualified hired). These women may have gone into clerical work, pushing other women into lower paid factory and service jobs (Milkman, 1975:16,17).

While sex-segregation of jobs protected women from the shocks of unemployment, (but gradually worsened their situation in the labor force), at home, women were deflecting and absorbing the impact of their hosband's and sons' worsening situation. Women cut back on family expenditures as families moved to quarters with lower rent, had telephones removed, went without purchasing new clothes and other consumer items. Women used their unpaid labor in the home to save on everyday living expenses; reversing the trend of the 1920's they canned food, made their own bread, remade old clothes and did a thousand other things to save on household bills. They also used their domestic skills to earn cash income by taking in laundry, ironing and dressmaking, by baking cakes to sell and taking in boarders.

Women becaue deeply engaged in the psychological support work necessary during the Depression to encourage husbands laid off from work, and to mediate conflicts between young and old in expanded households where old people "doubled up" with a married son or daughter or where young people returned home to live with their parents. Women's increased importance in the family and at work was not always highly valued; men resented being unemployed and depending on a wife's wages. Families were deeply ashamed of their lowered standard of living; they stopped attending church and community activities and were reluctant to invite

guests into their home. (Milkman, 1975:38).

It is important to emphasize that the ways in which women experienced the economic crisis of the Depression varied widely depending on class, ethnic and regional background. Studs Terkel's interviews with individuals who lived through the Depression gives some sense of these differences. A young socialite daughter like Phyllis Lorimor (Terkel, 1970:125-127) was forced to leave her boarding school life and eventually find a job as a Hollywood extra, and "southern belle" Diana Morgan was deeply humilitated that her family had been forced to let their cook and servents go and cut off their telephone; she, nevertheless, went to work as a case worker placing families on relief and getting them certified for the Rural Rehabilitation program (Terkel, 1970:181-187). Other women were not nearly as fortunate. Mary Owsley followed her husband to the Kentucky coal mines and helped him eke out a living sharing the same outdoor water pump with several other families, paying high prices to the company store, and borrowing on the next pay check to buy medicines and other necessities. When she and her family returned to Oklahoma City, they suffered the dust storms, chronic unemployment, and the soup lines (Terkel, 1970:62-63,235). Emma Tiller, a Black woman and wife of a tenant farmer, picked cotton in Texas early in the Depression, stood in line for Government rations and finally, in the late 1930's worked as a cook for a rich White woman in Wichita Falls, preparing fancy food for large lawn parties in return for meager wages (Terkel, 1970:268-70; 513-516).

However, the coping stragegies of women and other family members were not always successful. The Depression tended to exaggerate previous family patterns; "well-organized" families became more unified, while the problems of unstable families were accentuated. On the one hand, the number of marriages declined and couples put off having children, attempting to keep their families small. On the other, dessertions increased, though the actual number of legal divorces (an ex-

pense many could not afford) did not rise. These contradictory tendencies, of some families "pulling together" and finding internal strength to meet external pressures in contrast to others who found these same pressures difficult to adapt to is indicated in the Lynds finding that in Middletown, "Each family seems to wish wistfully that the Depression had not happened to it, while at the same time feeling that the Depression has in a vague general way 'been good for family life'" (Lynd and Lynd, 1937:146).

The coming of World War II, brought America out of the Depression and women into the labor force in increasing numbers. Between 1940 and the peak of war employment in 1944, the number of women in the paid labor force increased by 6 million or 50 percent (Tobias and Anderson, 1973:9; Milkman, 1975:19). The largest increase came in manufacturing, but the female clerical labor force also experienced a doubling, while the number of women in service occupations declined. Heavy industrial "war jobs" became available to women--in aircraft assembly, shipbuilding, ammunition manufacturing and steel, and women moved into these jobs attracted by the high wages and superior working conditions in unionized shops. But not all women who fit our image of "Rosie the Riviter" were previously housewives--women who entered the labor market for the first time during the War. Many were women who had previously worked out of necessity, mainly in low-paid service jobs and who experienced considerable upward mobility with the advent of new jobs for women. Sixty percent of the women who entered jobs between 1940 and 1944 were 35 years old or more, and half of them were or had been married. Thus reversing the trend of the previous decades, wives and mothers came into the labor force.

On the job, however, women did not face an easy situation. Personal accounts of experiences in shipbuilding and welding indicate that, on the one hand women rose to the pressures and difficulties of this new work (Clawson, 1975) while on the other hand, there was considerable prejudice concerning their presence in the

shipyard. Men were often polite and courteous to women workers, but underneath there were subtle forms of antagonism; women were watched carefully lest they flirt with male workers, strict dress rules governed their clothing choice and they were often shifted from job to job until they ended up doing tasks less well liked by the men. Many men felt women did not do an honest day's work and were not sympathetic to the benefits of unionization. (Archibald, 1975)

The ideology surrounding manufacturing and industrial "war related" jobs stressed the parallels between women's "natural work in the home" and those on the job. Running an overhead crane was just like operating "a gigantic clothes wringer" the winding of wire spools was just like crocheting, and riveting work on airplanes was just like sewing up the seam of a dress. (Milkman, 1975: 61) A pamphlet stressing the importance of safety caps for female machine operators also emphasized that they came in 12 different styles. All these attempts to "feminize" male jobs were based on the premise that women's war work was temporary and the view that women's important roles were those of wife, mother or woman, rather than as worker.

At home, women's situation was also not an easy one. In addition to the difficulties of separation from young husbands or worries over youthful sons who had been drafted, women had to cope with shortages, higher prices and later rationing, all daily constraints on women in their efforts to feed their families, provide adequate clothing and make a comfortable home life. Working women, some of whom worked night shifts in order to take care of home responsibilities during the day, held down "two jobs," being responsible for housework and child care when they returned from work. Although a few day care centers and collective kitchens were set up in some factories and communities, the extent to which these services were broadly assessable to women was minimal. Most women left their children in the care of their husband (on another shift than

the wife) or with another relative (either inside or outside of the household) (Tobias and Anderson, 1973:30). The war, however, subordinated women's role in the family to the needs of the economy in a time of labor shortage.

At the beginning of the war, public pronouncements indicated that women's work outside the home was only temporary and that they would retire from the work force after the conflict had ended. However, by the end of the war, most women workers were saying that they wanted to continue working. Survey after survey showed that those who had worked before the war, undoubtedly those who needed to work to support themselves and their families, were particularly those who wanted to stay on the job (Tobias and Anderson, 1973:16). When the layoffs came in 1944 and continuing to 1946, women were laid off in a disproportionate number from manufacturing and war-related industries (Milkman, 1975: 25). As these same plants converted to peace-time production, women lost their seniority and were not rehired, or were re-classified and placed in "women's jobs" in the factory or plant (Tobias and Anderson, 1973:20-22). Other women returned to the labor force in low-paying service jobs of the kind they held during the war. Female labor force participation continued to expand during the post-war years, but women no longer penetrated high-paying "men's jobs"; instead they were added to the growing clerical, secretarial and service occupations.

AMERICAN WOMEN AT MID-CENTURY

In the 1950's American women's situation can be characterized by two conflicting trends. On the one hand, women were urged to stay at home, to raise their families as good wives and mothers, while on the other hand an increasing number of women, especially those whose children had reached school age were part of the paid labor force. Underneath these broad trends were significant class, ethnic, and regional differences--differences which had a long historical

continuity and which continued despite the experiences of the Depression and World War II.

Middle class women in the 1950's were more affluent than their working class sisters and participated to a greater extent in the economic expansion of the economy. Many dropped out of college or married on graduation in order to settle down in the growing suburbs, married to men in professional and managerial jobs and raising families of three of four children.[9] Although new electrical appliances--vacuum cleaners, washing machines, steam irons, and freezers--continued to make household chores less laborious, the rising standards of housework (a trend started in the 1920's) and the expansiveness of suburban homes meant that middle class women spent even more hours on housework, in addition to child care and child related activities like the Boy scouts, dancing lessons, Sunday school and the PTA (Seeley et al., 1956). However, the suburban housewife, far from being the "dream image" of American womanhood--healthy, educated, beautiful, with home appliances, a station wagon, and the latest in stylish clothes--was, in reality, suffering from the "problem that had no name" (Friedan, 1963), concretized in terms of tiredness, boredom, lack of direction and a lack of fulfillment.

The role of wife and mother was experienced somewhat differently by working class women--many of whom were the daughters and granddaughters of the new immigrants, the mid-century descendents of the Polish laundresses, the Italian homeworker, and the French Canacian weavers. Like middle class men, blue collar men married early and their wives stayed out of the labor force while rais-

9. By the end of the 1950's, the average age of marriage had dropped to 20, the proportion of women attending college, in comparison with men, declined from 47% in 1920 to 35% in 1958 and, by the mid-fifties, 60% of women dropped out of college to marry or for fear that too much education would make it difficult to find a mate (Friedan, 1960:12). Friedan also notes that the number of women with three or more children doubled in 20 years and educated women "led all others in the race to have more babies." (Friedan, 1960:157).

ing children. Some second generation immigrant women may have been able to move into more skilled jobs and benefit from an upsurge in union wages. Lower mortgage rates and veteran's benefits may have allowed some to move to lower middle class or working class suburbia (Gans, 1967; Berger, 1960). However, many second generation immigrant men remained in urban ethnic neighborhoods and in semi-skilled and unskilled jobs. Whether they moved or stayed the lives of blue-collar families were much more difficult than those of the affluent college-educated suburbanites studied by Friedan.

Women in these second ant third generation immigrant families led lives centered on being wives and mothers, a status which they found important and fulfilling (Komarovsky, 1962:56). Husband-wife relationships were still segregated, but less so than in the past. Men were involved in their work and their male friends, while women had strong ties to their mothers (Komarovsky, 1962:26-40). However, second generation men were more likely than their fathers to bring their male friends into the home for socializing, and they were more likely to help with some of the housework (Gans, 1962:53). Married couples tended to live near their kin, particularly the wife's parents, and involvement with parents and siblings was an important aspect of working class ethnic life. "Thus for many working-class people, premarital friendships, ties to parents and siblings and group affiliations are maintained for a long time after marriage. Friends rather than spouses are ordinarily expected to be a person's main companions in the working class." (Fried, 1973:140).

As in the previous generation, the neighborhood and community were important in working class ethnic life. "The image of home, of a feeling of kinship among unrelated individuals, and a sense of belonging and of proprietary rights establish the quality of working class conceptions of neighborhood." (Fried, 1973:226). Ethnic involvement in terms of commitments to various ex-

pressions of ethnicity in a multi-ethnic neighborhood like the West End of Boston seemed less pronounced than in the past. Most women spoke the language of their national origin, often cooked their own ethnic foods, and celebrated ethnic holidays, although social relationships tended to include people of other ethnic groups. (Fried, 1973:181) In this context, religious commitment (either to Catholicism or Judiasm) seemed to be highly linked with ethnic involvement and to be part of the pattern of structuring relationships around a dense network of neighbors and kin, a working class pattern of some historical depth (Fried, 1973:184).

Despite the satisfaction working class women in the 1950's derived from their roles as wives and mother, housework was time consuming and hard; the day was filled with busy chores done without the benefit of the latest appliances or the convenience of an automobile, and the pressures of "making ends meet" financially were considerable. Working class ethnic women had realistic worries about their husband's job security and hoped that sickness or a lay-off would not make it impossible to meet fixed budget items such as rent, food, utilities, and installment payments. As the authors of Workingman's Wife comment, "They know that life is not a bed of roses and they feel they cannot let it get them down...there is evidence of a determination to keep going, a resolve supported by the kind of wishfulness (that has been described) (Rainwater et al., 1959).

In every decade since 1900 more and more women have gone out to work, so many wives and mothers from all class and ethnic groups are part of dual worker or dual career families.[10] In the 1950's the dual career mother in the suburbs

10. Dual career families are those in which both husband and wife have professional (high paying) occupations. The much more typical situation is the dual worker family where the husband has a blue collar job and the wife is employed in a clerical sales or factory position.

was still an anomaly, but working class women who worked (often ignored in sociological studies) contributed a valuable amount to family income. Most working class women have worked out of financial need and have taken jobs as seamstresses, bill clerks, salesladies, and waitresses (Fried, 1973:174). The post-war trend has been for more married women to work, especially those whose children are older, so that by the end of the 1960's, married women were as likely to work as single women. The changes in this period have meant that the dual worker family is becoming the norm rather than an exceptional circumstance.

Blacks began to migrate to the Northern cities during the First World War and the 1920's. This migration continued after World War II and into the 1960's, so that Blacks (and other recent migrants such as Puerto Ricans, Mexican and other Spanish speaking peoples, and Appalachians) have filled the unskilled and semi-skilled jobs in the growing service sector of the economy. Members of these groups have suffered the most from unemployment, underemployment, poor housing, lack of adequate health care and other aspects of poverty in the last twenty-five years. Historically, we have seen that most Black women have had to combine paid work (at low wages) with domestic responsibilities and house work; this continued to be true in the 1950's and into the present period. Labor force participation rates have always been higher for non-white than white women, and most are employed as service workers (49%), clerical workers (31%) and blue collar workers (18%) (Women's Bureau, 1969). The racial and sex segregation of the labor force has meant that most black women are employed as private household workers and in other service occupations and receive low pay (only 70% of what white women receive on the average). Given the lack of child care facilities and well-paid employment, some black women have resorted to welfare as their only option. Poor and working class Black women have adapted to their economic situation through the development of strong kin-based domestic networks of female and male relatives, neighbors, friends, husbands and lovers who exchange goods and services

in order to make scarce resources go further. We have already seen this as a pattern developed by white immigrant and working class women at the turn of the century to deal with the same economic problems. Stack, in a recent study of AFDC families, has shown that "swapping" and "trading" clothing, furniture, money, and small services in addition to child-keeping and baby-sitting are important ways in which Black women stretch resources (Stack, 1974). While white working class women may use a narrow circle of mothers, sisters and daughters for these important reciprocal arrangements, Black women in more difficult economic circumstances will often be part of much more widely dispersed networks which include friends, neighbors, relatives in the South or kin in different Northern cities.

Many Black women aspire to the familial values of the society at large, but may be unable to realize them. Ladner's study of black adolescents in the 1960's stresses the model of the resourceful, strong married woman and the centrality of motherhood. She emphasizes that for young Black girls from low income families, becoming a mother is an essential part of becoming a woman; motherhood symbolizes the ability to take on responsibility and to free oneself from parental control (Ladner, 1971). The reality, of course, is that, because of poverty and racism, many Black women are not able to attain the ideal of a stable nuclear family. Black males are often unable to find steady, well-paying jobs which will allow them to fill the role of provider, and women thus rely on their relatives and kin, plus whatever their husbands and boyfriends are able to provide in a time of relative affluence.

There were few Black professional women in the 1950's, but an increasing number in recent years; most are teachers and nurses, but a small number are doctors, lawyers, editors, and college teachers (Epstein, 1973). Cynthia Epstein's study of Black professional women in the 1960's shows that most have an image of

"woman as doer"; they have self-confidence, have received encouragement from their parents in their education and career choice, and believe that motherhood and work are not incompatible, but expected. Despite the difficulties of being both black and a women in a white male work, Epstein feels that the "positive effects of the double negative" have allowed these women to adapt successfully to their roles.

Many women from Appalachia and other parts of the rural South are still part of the conservative conscience of the region. For some of these women, as Roxie Hobson has put it, "Their communities are a closed society. The church, the schools are the center of their lives. They believe in tradition, the Bible, and Satan. Their lives are calm, peaceful and orderly. They resist any invasion of that order. In the more industrialized areas these closed communities are a product of the ways in which mining companies and textile manufacturers have created towns with a labor force dependent on a corporation for jobs. Mill and Mine owners and managers control not only wages and work conditions but also housing and almost every other aspect of community (churches and recreational facilities, all built by owners) (Boyte, 1972:222-223). In such communities wives of miners and women who are textileworkers often have a very clear perception of the inequalities of the social structure and the realities of poverty. Kathy Kahn's interviews with "Hillbilly Women" demonstrates the concrete ways in which these women have struggled against these inequities and for their families. Crystal Lee Jordan's own story shows the complex relationship between the mill company's control over her parents lives and later her own work situation, on the one hand, and her personal relationships with men and her definition of herself as woman, wife and mother, on the other. Conservative ideas about women's proper behavior can always make a woman feel ashamed of her past or cut down her attempt to change her life.

Other Appalachian women have, like Black women from the south, migrated to Northern industrial cities where they have experienced discrimination, low pay for industrial work, and difficulties in keeping their families together. Howell's pictures of families in his book, Hard Living on Clay Street (1973), depict women who spend considerable time and energy keeping their families together, while Kathy Kahn's interviews (1974) stress the range of jobs which women take, the different ways in which they fill their roles as wives and mothers, their feelings about living in rundown neighborhoods, and their attemots to deal with the problems of urban poverty.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

As we reach the mid-point of the 1970's, we find women in many differing positions: working and non-working, middle-class and working class, urban and rural, Black and White. There are women with strong ethnic ties or religious orientations, first generation city dwellers and suburbanites. These contrasts, depicted in the lives of the women mentioned in the introduction to this paper, are the differences which separate a southern mill worker from an interior decorator and divide a taxi-driver's wife from a woman doctor. These differences can be summarized as follows:

The middle class woman finds herself isolated in a suburban nuclear family: she may be educated, but economically dependent on her husband's professional career. No longer a lady, she enjoys an affluent life style, but may not be entirely satisfied with her role as "just a housewife". Increasingly, she has gone back to school, taken a job, or stayed in a career during her childbearing years. Where middle class women hold religious beliefs which support her family role, and where regional or rural conservativism buttresses her sense that being a wife and mother contributes importantly to community well-being, these

factors may counteract the overall trend to new economic activities and cultural definitions.

The working class woman, by contrast, is the center of a social network. Her income, if she works, is important to family well-being; her job may provide sociability, but its content is often dull, repetitive or requires standing on her feet all day. Her housework is important and motherhood is vital to the family. The ethnic community and the Catholic Church support her functions as wife and mother.

For the Black, Puerto Rican, and Appalachian women especially caught on the edge of unemployment and poverty, the social network of women, kin, friends, and neighbors is even more crucial for exchanging needed goods and services. For Black women, motherhood is womanhood and mothers are associated with responsibility and survival. This is true for the middle class Black woman as well, through her education has provided access to more secure, better paid jobs.

Are these differing cultural definitions and economic realities destined to separate women indefinitely? Are there current forces which are creating disenchantment with traditional women's roles and which might bring women of different situations together? Three factors--increased female labor force participation, increased divorce rate, and decreased birth rate--are all having an impact on women's situation in the 1970's. In 1973, 44.7% of all women worked (including 55.0% of women between 16 and 24; and 49.9% of all women, 25-64) (Manpower Report of the President, 1974:254-255). In other words, 38.9% of all workers were women; more importantly, 42.2% of all married women were working, and 32.7% of all women with children under six were employed (U.S. Statistical Abstracts, 1974:33:6,34). This means that a substantial proportion of American families are dual-career or dual-worker families where both the husband and wife are employed, and a significant number are families with small children.

At the same time, the divorce rate, especially among younger couples, increased by two-thirds between the mid-1950's and 1970, and demographers are predicting that one out of three marriages of young women around thirty years of age will end in divorce (Glick and Norton, 1973:310). Although the rate of remarriage also rose between 1950 and 1970, not all divorced women are getting remarried. There has been a dramatic increase in the number of single women living alone (Kobrin, 1974) and of female headed families. The number of the latter have increased ten times as fast as the number of two-parent families since 1950 and by a total of one million between 1970 and 1973 (Sawhill, 1974). While the employment experience of married women may have contributed to the increased divorce rate, it is also true that many more women are now supporting families than has been the case in the past.

In addition, the birth rate has been steadily falling as birth control has become more available to women. Even the average number of children in Catholic families, many of whom are working class, has declined. A 1970 National Fertility Study reported that the desired number of children for a Catholic woman had fallen from 3.45 in 1965 to 2.75 in 1970. (The figure for non-Catholic women had fallen from 2.57, to 2.35 in the same period. Seifer, 1973:55). Furthermore, the period of time that American women will devote to maternity is shrinking; over half of American mothers have had their last child by the time they reach their thirtieth birthday. Thus the mothering of pre-school children adds up to less than a seventh of a woman's total life time and no longer defines the major portion of an adult woman's experience.

It may be that these general statistics hide class, ethnic, and racial differences, but I think they still indicate convergence. Divorce will no longer be a middle class phenomenon, but will be experienced by working class women as well. Being the female head of a family will increasingly be a situation in

which White as well as Black women find themselves.[11] Middle class college educated women, as well as the wives of blue collar workers will experience longer periods in the labor force. And finally, working class and Black women may increasingly find themselves isolated in nuclear families, away from a network of kin and neighbors, just as middle class women experienced this isolation in the 1950's and early 1960's.

I have stressed that working class and Black women have found support for their roles in a social network of kin and neighbors and in the institutions of the neighborhood and local community (churches, clubs, recreation areas). The late 1950's and 1960's brought the destruction of many white ethnic neighborhoods through urban renewal. The West End of Boston, torn down in the late 1950's is a good example (Gans, 1962, Fried, 1973); in other cases, community members, often women, have fought to save their communities from the bulldozer (Krickus in Feldstein and Costello, 1974; Adubato and Krickus, 1973). Economic forces (such as FHA loans) have pulled working class families to the suburbs, but Sennett and Cobb's recent study, The Hidden Injuries of Class, also indicates that upwardly mobile blue collar couples may move to cut their ties with family and relatives. They, if we can take the men's word for it, feel the extended family to be more of a burden than a source of strength. It may be that women feel differently and that their increasing isolation from mothers, sisters and childhood friends in working class suburbs may be a difficult adjustment. (Young and Willmott, 1957 provide evidence of such a situation for British working class women).

The isolation of the housewife is also related to problems of adapting

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11. Social scientists have, of course, concentrated too heavily on poor Black families and female headed households, often ignoring poverty among white families and underemphasizing the majority of Black nuclear families.

family responsibilities to new work roles. Upper middle class professional women have tended to handle work and home responsibilities by hiring cleaning ladies, au pair girls to care for young children, and asking their husbands and children to do more housework. The average working class and middle income wife does not have the financial resources to use these strategies, so that with both the lack of close kin and day care facilities, they are put under a more difficult burden in adjusting home and work responsibilities.

When women, both middle class and working class, enter the paid labor force, they enter a segregated occupational structure. Everyone knows that there are "men's jobs" and "women's jobs", but it is also true that women's jobs are low paying. Most women are employed in clerical and service occupations; they have "jobs," not professions. Most women are not doctors or lawyers or college teachers when they go out to work; they are typists, secretaries, nurses, teachers, sales workers and waitresses. Women's median earnings of $5,323 in 1970 were 59% of the male median earnings of $8,066 (Niemi and Lloyd, 1975), and even two thirds of the women working full-time year round have annual incomes below $5,000. If a woman supporting a family were to take a job (in contrast to welfare), she could not support a family above poverty level in over half of the usual female jobs (Sawhill, 1974).

At the same time, the mass of women's clerical and service jobs are becoming more and more routinized and factory like. With the advent of office machines, computer technology and scientific management, women's clerical jobs are being broken into smaller, more routine segments; there is less job autonomy, less skill needed to perform the job, and it is more closely supervized and boring (Braveman, 1974).

With the exception of the few who are able to get into professional careers, many college educated women finding themselves in clerical, sales, and service

jobs and are finding job conditions as alienating and routinized as are working class women. Even teaching, social work, and nursing--traditional professional jobs for women--are suffering from deteriorating work conditions (larger classrooms, greater case loads, and crowded hospital facilities). Middle class divorced women are often forced to be economically independent taking jobs not too different from those of working class women.

The long term trend, in terms of family structure, towards isolated nuclear families has been true for middle class women since the 1930's. But now, working class women are becoming more isolated as the strains of maintaining work and family take them out of a kin network and as the breakup of urban ethnic neighborhood draws kin and neighbors apart.

Will these converging trends be enough to override ethnic, racial and class differences? I think not, but there are issues which are emerging on which women can agree and on which they can work together. One important issue is child care, and the establishment of low cost community-controlled day-care centers would benefit women of many different backgrounds. It is also clearly necessary to change the nature of occupational segretation, not just getting a few more women into male professions or into skilled manual jobs, but to restructure and upgrade the mass of clerical and service jobs which are now labeled as "women's work". I am therefore encouraged by recent efforts in New York, Boston and Chicago to organize clerical workers and sales employees, and I think it is important that there is now a national organization of trade union women (CLUW) which can work for the interests of women who are blue-collar workers, teachers, clerical workers, and farm workers. Women can work together to preserve their neighborhoods and through tenant's unions to get better housing. Women need better health care, better credit facilities, equality in social security benefits and more educational opportunities, especially for those who have been out of the work force during child

bearing years. All these issues can bring women together and possibly override class and ethnic differences.

This does not mean that the effort to bring women of diverse backgrounds together will be an easy one. The recent defeat of a state ERA ammendment in New York and New Jersey indicates the resistence of many women to legislation which they perceive will undermine their roles as women and as wives and mothers.[13] In addition, fluctuations in the American economy have an impact on women's economic lives and their perceptions of themselves. As we saw during the Depression, the family and women's roles within it became important in absorbing the shocks of unemployment and lowered income. During the present recession, a similar process may be at work, pushing women in the direction of conservative cultural values, throwing them "back into the family" in a period when layoffs are affecting their husbands and even themselves. Not only are women in semi-skilled factory positions being laid off, but this recession and the fiscal crisis of city governments is, for the first time, having an important impact on white collar and public jobs (clerical, secretarial, teaching, and social service jobs), many of which are being held by women.

In this economic and cultural climate, many older women, those in rural areas, particularly in the South, those with strong religious convictions, or those who have committed themselves to the roles of wife and mother may feel particularly threatened and feel the need to be especially protected under the

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13. Voting returns which indicated that the ERA carried by 59% in New York City, but lost in the upstate areas supports the results reported in a recent Harris poll which showed 51% in favor and 36% against the ERA. The core of support comes from men, young people, Blacks and residents of the East and West Coast, with resistence from older people, including women, from the South, the Midwest and the more conservative areas of the nation. That 66% of those under thirty support the ERA indicates that young women perceive the ERA as helping rather than threatening their life goals (New York Post, 1975).

law. It may be that the Doctor Lydia Blacks and Ellen Grazianos are deeply committed to their life patterns and that only a few women like Ruth Levine and Crystal Lee Jordan will be able to change their traditional roles and attitudes. However, legislative reforms like the ERA speak to and benefit women in the new converging situations--women who are married and mothers, women who are divorced and supporting a family, women who are single, those who are working--in other words women in need of jobs, credit, education, better health care and benefits, and protection from all forms of discrimination. Understanding and appreciating the cultural diversity among women, that women speak from different ethnic, class, religious, and regional backgrounds will perhaps help us to bridge those differences and to communicate the similarities in all women's situations so that women can work together to change and improve their position in the family, in the work force, and in the political arena and the life of the nation.

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